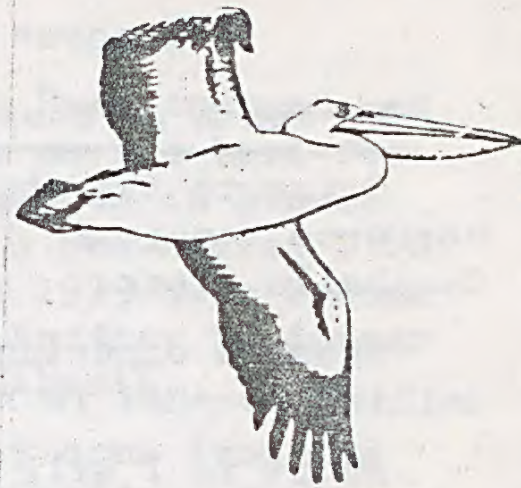
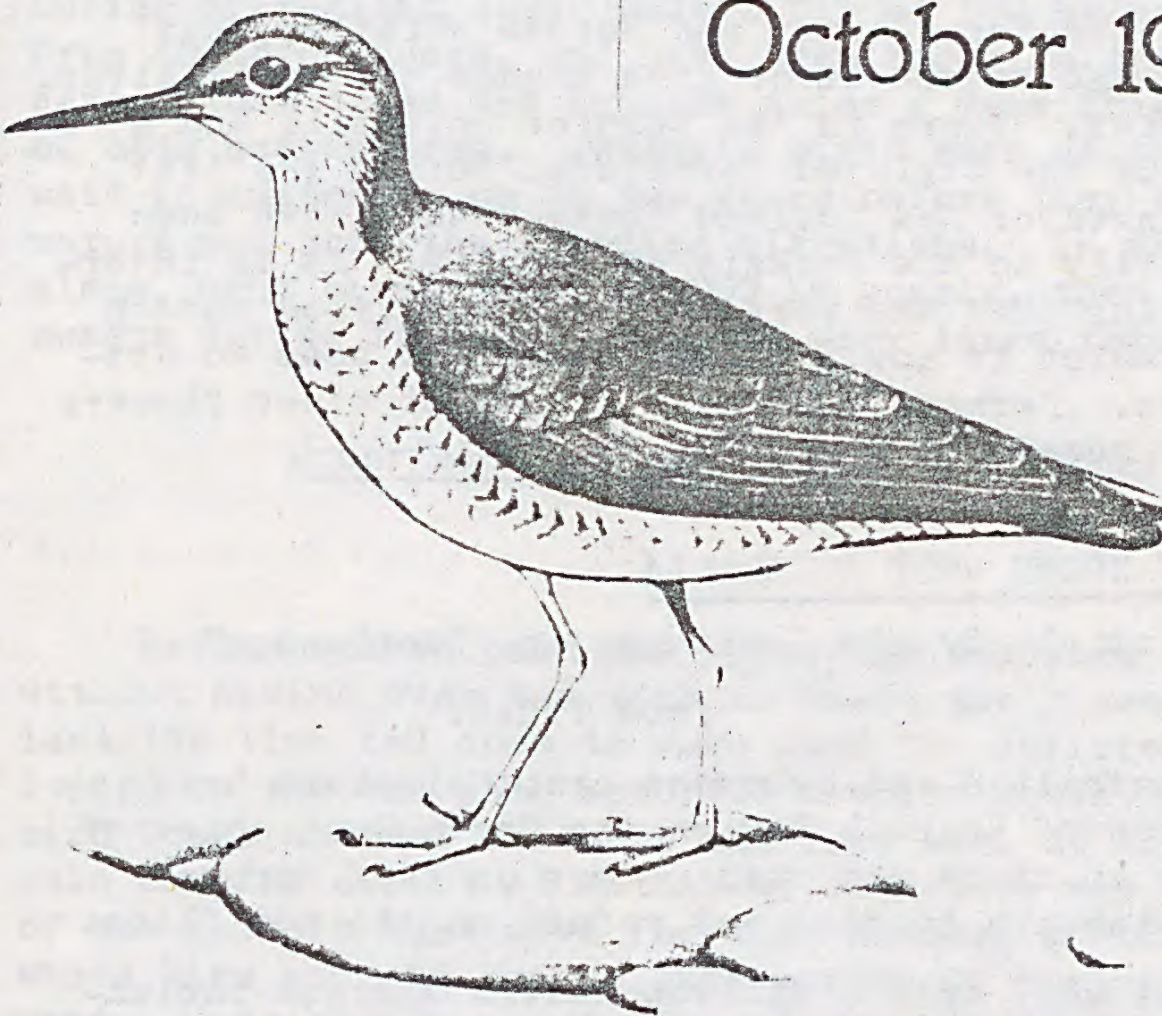


CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



October 1984

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Banding wading birds in N.W. Australia
Article page 2

President: John Dare Ph. 76 4227

Secretary: Beri Perry Ph 73 4240

General meetings : at Castlemaine High School, Lawson Parade
at 8 p.m., second Friday of the month.

Outings: usually on the second Saturday of the month, leaving
from the S.E.C. building, Mostyn St, at 1.30 p.m.

The Month at Campbells Creek

Owing to the absence of our correspondent, this month we must perforce remain in ignorance of the ways of Nature in the area of Campbells Creek.

What an opportunity for someone else to get into print by telling us what is happening in their area.

As it is I will have to tell you what has happened in my garden and that is not very much. The early morning has brought a burst of song from Yellow-faced Honey-eater and Rufous Whistler, but later in the day when the Wattle-birds have chased the small birds away, it is rather quiet. There is the regular Spinebill and a fairly constant call of the Striated Pardalote. During the last week or so, Yellow-winged or New Holland Honey-eaters have been paying visits, especially to the *Banksia ericifolia*. It is interesting and disappointing that the very large *E. leucoxylon* out on the side of the road which is now in flower does not seem to attract many Honey-eaters. Perhaps they have plenty of other flowers to choose from at the moment.

BIRD BANDING IN NORTH WEST AUSTRALIA

Excerpts from an article by Kim Courtenay in "Overlander"
from T.E.C.

In recent years Australian and overseas ornithologists have travelled to the shores of Roebuck Bay on the North West coast of Australia near Broome to study and band waders as they arrive from the Northern Hemisphere to rest and refuel on the mud flats.

It is estimated that well over a million waders migrate including:- Great Knots, Whimbrels, Tattlers, Large Sand Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Terek Sandpipers, Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, Red Knots, Sand Dotterels, Mongolian Dotterels, and others. One of the first banded of this season was a juvenile Red Knot about eight weeks old which had wasted over half its normal weight in its almost direct flight of 12,000 Km from the Arctic Circle. After capture by netting the birds are measured, banded, some painted with a dab of dye for recognition, and importantly a swab is taken for the microbiology Departments of W.A. and the Commonwealth. This study of the swabs is to see if the birds are bringing in diseases that may have been picked up during their migration through Asia; such as mosquito-related diseases, overseas poultry, and influenza type diseases. Similar banding is carried

out in Malaysia and Russia where information is exchanged.

The expedition found a Curlew Sandpiper with a Russian band and the state of the band indicated that it had been on the bird for two years. After the 1982 expedition 19 birds banded in Broome were recaptured in Victoria within five weeks. A Red-necked Stint banded and painted with a yellow dye in November 1979 near Broome was recaptured near Hobart just 23 days later. Another Sandpiper banded near Perth was recaptured at Batagaj in Siberia.

Other recoveries of Australian bands regularly come from the market places of Asia and China where Waders are sold as food. During migrations some Waders fly at 100 Km/hr., remain in the air from 40 to 60 hours, and have been known to travel 6,500 Km in 7 days. Most cross the Equator twice a year following the summers of both hemispheres. Juvenile birds such as the Red Knot often wait in Australia up to two years before they become sexually mature and join the breeding migrations. In migration flights alone, many birds cover 25,000 Km yearly, then add their constant sweeps during feeding, making a very large total.

Wyperfeld National Park A personal view.

by the Ed.

Having driven past the Wyperfeld roadsign at Hopeton many times without having ever had time to visit the place, I decided that at last the time had come to make good the deficiency. Accordingly I loaded up the van with assorted camping goods, binocs, camera and bird books and set forth in the last week of August. On my previous solo camping effort at Hattah my departure was marked by the onset of the hottest heat wave for that summer, on this occasion the cold winds blew and the rain clouds massed on the horizon, however off I went. Sure enough, just after I turned off the Henty Highway at Beulah I ran into some of the heaviest rain I had ever encountered. Still, consoled by the thought that I had a nice dry van to sleep in, on I went.

Shortly afterwards the clouds rolled away allowing the sun to reveal a Mallee clad in green through the wheat-growing areas. It also showed many mice scuttling across the road and under the wheels. After passing through Yaa-peet, I was accompanied by large numbers of Tree Martins for the rest of the trip to Wyperfeld. Arriving at the Park campground, I was delighted to find that there was a large and modern kitchen shelter which I made good use of during my stay as the rain was never far away, and often seemed to

arrive at mealtimes. There was of course no power, but water was on tap from two large rainwater tanks, and the 8 large tables built into alcoves along each side of the shelter made it very cosy. Like North American parks I had visited, each campsite had its own table and benches and steel fireplace with barbecue. Wood was plentiful almost everywhere, but was not for the burning. As the park literature pointed out, fallen timber was a vital element of the park ecology and was to be left where found. Campers could however obtain wood from the vicinity of the track into the park.

Next morning, after visiting the very well setup information centre at the campground, I decided to do the walk to Lake Brambruck to see where the Wimmera River finished up. This is quite an easy walk of about 6 Km, although the length is greatly increased by frequent detours to inspect flowering plants, listen to bird calls, etc. The track itself is quite sandy and therefore soft going in most places, which makes it a little harder, but not greatly.

The most striking flower in bloom at the time was the Twiggy Guinea Flower, which covered quite large areas in many places. Another flower which was very common was the Fringed Heath-Myrtle but not the form which I have growing in my garden which is quite straggly. The Hyperfeld form is compact, bundled and upright. Other flowers included Tea Tree, some of the Mallees, Flame Heath, Peach Heath.

Many birds could be heard calling, but the majority took good care to keep out of sight among the foliage. A small child I passed heading in the opposite direction, warned me of an aggressive magpie which defended a section of the track near Lake Brambruck, so I had fortunately picked up a likely-looking leafy branch when I thought I was nearing the area. Nevertheless, it was a determined Magpie which eventually homed in with a clatter of wings. I was thankful for the warning.

Lake Brambruck would be a disappointment if one were expecting a lake in the usual sense. It is some time since there has been water in the lake bed. A ring of young Red Gum saplings marks where the water level stood during the last fill. A series of photographs in the Information Centre shows what the lake was like when water was last in it.

On the return trip I decided to go a short distance along a track which cut the Lake track at right angles, mainly to find a nice sheltered spot to have lunch. After lunching and watching various birds, including Chestnut-rumped Thornbills for some time I decided to cut across country to rejoin the main track. Well that was where I made my big mistake. Perhaps I had gone further along the side track than I thought, perhaps the main track veered away to the

East, or perhaps I headed off more to the West than I intended, thinking that as the track was more or less due North-South, all that I had to do was to head South-East in order to rejoin it. The sun which had been shining during my lunch break now decided to go behind a large bank of cloud, leaving me no idea where it now was. Too late I realised that I had not brought a compass. By this time I had come too far to retrace my steps so had no course but to press on in what I hoped was the right direction. Even maintaining direction became difficult as I encountered thickets of Tea-tree which had to be circumnavigated. After negotiating this area I plunged into an area of Mallee scrub where it seemed to be getting quite dark as the cloud cover increased and it started to look more and more like rain.

I had by now discarded the idea of cutting across diagonally to the track and had altered my direction, I hoped, to what I hoped would take me straight across to where the track ought to be. However the more I walked in what I thought was the correct direction without finding the track the more I began to get the feeling that I was really lost. I didn't really fancy spending the night in the Mallee either as I hadn't come properly equipped for such an exercise. Being in this rather depressed state I wasn't perhaps as

A

B



View of Wyperfeld Park from the Eastern Lookout.

Three major plant communities may be seen

A Black Box/Red Gum on the flood plain of Outlet Ck

B Cypress pine woodland

C Mallee scrub with Broom Baeckia on the dunes in the foreground.

impressed as I might have been when I rounded a large Tea Tree to come face to face with a family of Emu chicks and their mother. Nor did I have time to get my camera into action before they headed off into the scrub with Mum looking not too pleased at being interrupted in her stroll.

Saying Goodbye to the Emu family, I continued on, up and down sand ridges expecting to find the path at the bottom of the next dip. In that thick scrub it could be only a few metres away and not be visible so I was aiming to cut across it. However after I had been up and down many times without coming across it I was really beginning to wonder. And how stupid I was to go off into the scrub without letting anyone know where I was. I also made a note to not go off into the bush again without a match. But how could that track be so far away when I had only gone a short distance from it. Perhaps with no sun to guide I was going in circles as lost people are wont to do. At this stage I decided to do something a little smarter, like remembering that on the previous night the ABC weather forecast had predicted a cold change with the wind swinging to the S.West. I decided then that the wind must by now be blowing from that direction so altered course to keep it almost at my back in order to head due East as there was no doubt that I was somewhere to the West of the track.

I now decided that what I had to do was to climb a hill and look for a landmark. Now that sounds fine in theory but in Wyperfeld there are any amount of hills, sandhills, but very few landmarks. Or at least, very few that I could recognise. I decided therefore that I might as well climb a fairly high hill which was more or less in my path in the general direction I was heading. I hoped that when I reached the crest I would be able to spot the track just over the other side. It couldn't be very much further surely. It came as rather a disappointment therefore to scan the bush ahead and see no sign whatsoever of the track. The prospect of a night in the bush seemed to be very imminent. And I hadn't even brought an extra snack.

As I scanned the scene ahead with my binocs I suddenly realised that away in what seemed an incredible distance was a tree which seemed familiar. It was a large Casuarina which I had studied on the way out in the morning because of the bird life. I was amazed because the track I was looking for which I imagined to be quite close, was I knew, on the far side of the tree, if that indeed was the tree.

Sure enough, when I reached the tree, there was the track as I had hoped. What a relief. No need to wonder any longer how long it

would have taken for someone to realise that I was missing and institute a search, and no need to search for a cosy hole to curl up in for the night. Almost at the same moment, the rain which had been threatening for so long, really started to fall. That night I really enjoyed that hot meal and later on crawling into a nice warm sleeping bag.

Wyperfeld Birds

Birds were difficult to see in the thick scrub, but could frequently be heard, which was very frustrating. I really needed Stan.

Of particular interest were the pair of Little Eagles nesting in a large Red Gum close to the campground. Each afternoon they would be seen surveying their area, sometimes in company with a falcon of some type which I was not able to identify. The Parrots were delightful, especially the beautiful Regent Parrots; there were also many Mallee Ringnecks and the little Red-rumped Parrots. Two Peaceful Doves also took up their position near the camp each day, and White-browed Babblers were quite common in the Mallee.

I was most pleased to become acquainted with the Spiny-cheeked Honey-eater, Red-capped Robin, Grey Butcher-bird, the beautiful and brightly-coloured Splendid Wren, and the Chestnut Quailthrush. I had had some trouble with this last one on the first day, as it was very furtive and only afforded fleeting glimpses, which were very tantalising. However on the third day I encountered one which was giving its characteristic call. Altogether 43 birds in all.

PROJECT PELICAN

A Pelican survey is being conducted by the Bird Observers Club and the Gould League of Victoria. This survey will be conducted during four months, the first month of the survey being this month, October 1984.

Observers are asked to record the following information :-

Grid reference; (Castlemaine is in block R18.)

Distance from nearest town

Number of Pelicans

Plus

Area of water by name

What birds were doing

direction of flight etc.

If you can help with information, let one of the committee members know.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

Saturday 6 October All day walk in Wattle Flat Forest. The all day walk is an annual event. This time a circular path, through the bush to the N.W. of Castlemaine. Leave S.E.C. at 9.15 a.m.; park in private property. Bring lunch, camera, binoculars etc.

Saturday 6th-Sunday 7th October. Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Springtime get-together at Ringwood. See Cast Nat of Aug for details.

Wednesday 10 Oct. Afternoon excursion to N.E. Kalimna - birds and wildflowers. Meet at the top of the hill past the High School on the Tourist Road (the right angle bend on the highest point) at 4.15. Leader is E. Perkins.

Friday 12, Sat 13 and Sun 14 Oct. Western Victoria Field Nats Clubs Association Campout at the Grampians. Location is "Aginda" camp. Details available from the Secretary.

Friday 12 Oct Monthly Meeting. Speaker is Mr J. Dare - topic is "Gardens of Tuscany". 8.00 p.m. at the High School.

Wednesday 17 Oct. Afternoon excursion to Guildford. Meet at Guildford Store at 4.15 p.m. Leader is B. Perry.

Sunday 21 October. Excursion to Maryborough Bushland. All day excursion, so take your lunch. Leave S.E.C. Mostyn Street at 10.15 sharp, or meet at Maryborough P.O. at 11.00 a.m. Leaders - Maryborough F.N.C.

Wednesday 24 October. Afternoon excursion. Meet at Motel, Melb. Road. 4-15. arranged.

Leader K. Turner

Thursday 25 October. at L. Turner's Home, 39 Campbell St. (next to Convent)

Wednesday 31 Octobe To Muckleford. Meet Gower School, Aldon Road. Leader, G. Stith.

Saturday 3rd November Excursion to Muckleford. This is the F.N.C. contribution to the Festival Program, and our chance to show visitors our beautiful bushland. Meet at the Railway Station car park, Kennedy Street, at 1.30. Various leaders

Friday 9th November. Monthly meeting. Speaker is Mr Fred Rogers, who will speak on "The Little Desert". This will be part of the Festival Program.

Thursday 22nd November. Business meeting. 7.30 p.m.

Friday 14 December. Members and Visitors night. This is the final meeting for 1984. Bring a plate if possible.

WVFNCA Spring Campout, Halls Gap. Oct 12/13/14 1984.

Final reminder of this event. Information has been included in earlier editions of the Castlemaine Naturalist.